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ABSTRACT

In a politically changing world, "languages in contact" must be redefined as "speakers of different languages in contact," and the implications for language learning and teaching must be recognized. Phenomena occurring beyond the languages themselves should be addressed in both language instruction and the construction of language textbooks. Four significant phenomena occurring in multilingual contexts include: (1) linguistic condescension, or the adjustments (primarily simplification) made by a native speaker to a non-native speaker, often suggesting assumption of a lower intellectual standard; (2) language level, or command of the language appropriate to the context; (3) minorization, or being assumed to be in a lesser linguistic position and not allowed to express oneself; and (4) stereotyping that occurs when idioms are misinterpreted as prejudicial comments. These problems are generally, and inappropriately, ignored in second language instruction and instructional materials. (MSE)

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Siegfried Wyler:

PROBLEMS OF LINGUISTIC INTERACTION IN MULTI-LINGUAL SOCIETIES.

Languages in the past were often studied as national languages. When you ask a language student what he reads at his university, the answer is, French or German or Russian. What we actually do when we give such answers is that we follow the pattern the 19th century has set for us: the national state was the state with one language or, to be more precise, one dominating, representative language, in accordance with the political maxim: one country one language, one language one country. This maxim was valid, with all its disastrous consequences, until the end of World War II. Presently, with all the changes going on in the political and economic attitudes and structures in Europe and elsewhere, and EC 1992 and the even larger EWR (Europäischer Wirtschaftsraum/ European Economic Space) in view, we realise that what Uriel Weinreich once called "languages in contact" may, or will, become a new reality existing beside the national language communities. Such a development, however, does not just mean that different languages are now heard and spoken in one place instead of at different places. It really means that speakers of different languages live close together and get into contact daily and in a multitude of situations. "Languages in contact" must be newly defined, the issue now is "speakers of different languages in contact".

This raises a number of questions which were often neglected in our earlier reflection on languages or in the learning and teaching of languages. It is essential to realise that human

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interaction in multi-lingual situations requires more of speakers than just a comprehensible pronunciation, a vocabulary, correct grammar and possibly some proficiency in writing. Not even idiomaticity is sufficient. Being aware of these circumstances we sometimes say that with a language one has to understand, study or learn its underlying culture or, as it is also put, we speak of "what is beyond language". Yet such global statements often remain vague or even empty. What then is meant when we speak of the "beyond language" ?

In the following I would like to discuss, briefly, four phenomena in the sphere of the so-called "beyond language". They are

1. CONDESCENSION 2. LANGUAGE LEVELS 3. MINORISATION 4. STEREOTYPES.

I shall conclude this papers with some reflections on the relevance of these issues for the TEACHING of foreign languages and the writers of TEXT-BOOKS for foreign language learning.

Communication in any language must take account of who speaks with whom, who speaks about what and who speaks where. Each of these three parameters bears on the sort of language used and the style of the verbalization of contents. Our findings relating to these questions are valid for speakers' mother-tongues. In fact research is mainly concerned with mother-tongue speakers. Socio-linguistics, linguistic stylistics or LSP is hardly ever cross-culturally oriented in the sense that linguistic behaviours in these fields are treated when languages or rather speakers of different mother-tongues are in communicative contact. Let me just , as an example, refer to Grice's Conversational Principles or Sperber-Wilson's well-known book "Relevance" or Leech and

Short " Style and Fiction" where questions as the ones mentioned above are raised. They are, though concerned with spoken or written conversation, based on, and intended for, the authors' mother-tongues or the language in which the books is written. Even studies in socio-linguistics generally concentrate on the one language investigated. The question "who speaks with whom?" where one speaker for example speaks his mother-tongue and the other speaker speaks a foreign language is very rarely raised. Among the few publications that contain essays where cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communicative issues are treated I may mention "Strategies in Interlanguage Communication" eds. C. Faech and G. Kasper, Longman, 1983, or "Minorisation Linguistique et Interaction", eds. B.Py and R. Jeanneret, Neuchatel, 1989, or then work done by John Gumperz.

In this paper I will restrict myself mainly to the first parameter "who speaks to whom?" where one of the interlocutors speaks an L 1 and the other an L 2. This implies that we investigate what results from phenomena which are found in a mono-lingual environment when they occur in situations with a bi-lingual or multi-lingual background. This is , for instance, the case where specialists from one country do work in another country, or where in the wake of free movement within Europe, people from one country prefer to live in another. There is nothing new in this, new perhaps, if at all, is that the future will produce more cases than the past. What has to be borne in mind is that in such societies not only problems of communication as such exist (from asking one's way to communication at work or

in social life) but also problems that are caused by what we called " what is beyond language".

1. Condescension. (Linguistic condescension)

Where interlocutors, the one using his L 1 , the other using that languge as an L 2 communicate one can often observe that the L 1 speaker tries to make things easier for the L 2 speaker. I am here thinking of an L 2 speaker who is less educated, for example one who has acquired his L 2 empirically at his work place or/and in encounters with natives. At home, among his compatriots he uses his mother-tongue. Such circumstances are, for instance, often found in Switzerland in the building trade or the catering business. The L 2 speakers are, in this case, generally native Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese or Yougoslavs. The German-speaking L 1 speaker then often tends to use infinitives instead of conjugated verbs : eg. "dort öffnen", "mir schreiben", "du mir morgen telephonieren". Also he reduces the sentence structure to brief asyndetic word groups, such as : "ich gestern Zürich gehen. dort freund treffen". In other words the L 1 speaker pidginizes his mother-tongue in order to approach it to the way it is used by the L 2 speaker who has a restricted command of this language. This is not unlike the way baby-talk is used by parents when talking to a baby.

This sort of language behaviour has, of course, also a psychological aspect. It is possible that the L 2 speaker registers nothing but the denotative contents carried by the words used, yet it is also possible that the L 2 speaker feels or realises intellectually that the L 1 speaker assumes that the L 2 speaker has a lower standard of education or even a restricted intellec-

tual standard. Thus what is, intentionally, to be a strategy of making communication possible and easier, can easily prove to be a pejorative marker or even a sign of superiority.

Or consider the following phenomenon: the L 2 speaker may have difficulties with the polite form of address in German: "du" within the family and with good friends, "Sie" with people one is not on a "du" basis. L 2 speakers, Italians, Yougoslavs, but also Americans, etc., often use "du" where they should use "Sie". This may result in two reactions on the part of the L 1 speaker:

a. he also uses the form of address "du" where he should use "Sie", e.g. " du mir morgen telephonieren " and thereby either just pidginized his L 1 or again demonstrates condescension or

b. the L 1 speaker himself is irritated or even embarrassed or offended by assuming that the L 2 speaker is taking liberties and treating him as one of his own class or group. Where L 1 speakers tend to emulate the pidginized L 2 of speakers with a restricted command of the other's L 1 they are prone to produce effects in the sphere "beyond language" that may embarrass or irritate the interlocutor and help create reserve or even tensions or conflict situations.

2. Level of language.

When speaking of language one often generalizes in a way as if language were a uniform phenomenon or uniform system. In reality any language has a great number of facets. As we know it can appear as a dialect, as a standardized language, as a language for special purposes. Moreover its representation strongly depends on the individual interlocutor's command of a language.

This is of importance in the mother-tongue, but it is equally important in an L2. In using the mother-tongue a speaker generally adapts his language to the actual occasion, e.g. he is colloquial or even slangy in friendly company, technical in business or science, formal when the occasion demands it, and so on. Much depends on the speaker's state of education and language awareness. Bernstein spoke of an elaborate and a restricted code of interlocutors. The L 2 speaker, in many cases, is closer to a restricted code speaker although in his mother-tongue he need not nescessarily belong to the group of speakers with a restricted code. One consequence is that he may use the mother-tongue speaker's language on the wrong language level. Thus, for instance, he may use the wrong form of address or he may use a slangy expression where it is out of place. Often he remains colloquial where he should be technical or where he should use the written style. It is in adapting one's language to the language level called for by the actual situation that L 2 speaker's are handicapped. This is often due to the way they learned their L 2. Too often only one form of representation of a language is taught or with less educated speakers the possibilities to move outside their social groups are too limited. What results is again embarrassment on the side of the speaker of the mother-tongue because existing language norms are violated by the L 2 speaker. unless the mother-tongue speaker makes allowance for the L 2 speaker's short-comings. (French-speaking Swiss are quite often react with reserve when German-speaking Swiss speak French stiltedly , or some Italians feel hurt when their language

is spoken ungrammatically. I rememberr being once reminded of the poor quality of my Italian by a waiter in Florence.). The problem is of greater consequence when the L 2 speaker in his new environment climbs the professional or the social ladder. He may then be confronted with the Pygmalion syndrome, i.e. the problem Eliza was faced with when Professor Higgins introduced her to his own social world.

3. Minorisation

We can speak of minorisation or majorisation where both terms mean the same or, we can understand mirorisation as the state of being minorised and majorisation as the act of majorising an interlocutor. The linguistc phenomenon is that one of the interlocutors a. has a better command of the language than the other, and/or b. that this one knows how to use the language more subtly. In other words he knows about the "beyond the language", he develops a strategy that gives him an advantage on account of his mastery of the language or, and that is often the case, he does not give the other interlocutor a chance to expess his thoughts or to make his point. This, of course, is a frequently met situation wih mother-tongue speakers. Think of the situation where a speaker very politely makes it impossible for another to bring forth what he wants to say or what he wants to get. There was an excellent example on English television where a plain clothes inspector whose being down-graded to a policeman on the beat had already been decided upon was unable to make his arguments against the decision when he was called to meet the Superintendent because this one treated him with polite phrases and the expression of understanding his position until at last

the police inspector gave up and left humiliated with an "I understand, sir".

Majorisation often occurs without the speaker being aware of what he or she is doing. Think only of the Teacher - Pupil situation, the boss and the employee, the expert and the layman. It is not difficut to imagine that in societies with a multi-lingual and multi-cultural background, the risk of majorising or minorising an interlocutor who speaks the language as an L 2 is even more serious. It can almost always be assumed that the foreign language speaker is less proficient in the language than the speaker of the mother-tongue and, which is most important, that he is not necessarily familiar with the existing norms and the cultural differences between his native culture and the one of the country he is presently living in. Gumpertz in his video-film "Cross-talk" gives a pertinent example: an Indian who has lived in England for many years is without a job. He goes to the Labour Exchange in order to claim Unemployment Benefit to which he thinks he is entitled. The official tells him that for some reason he does not qualify for Unemployment Benefit but he does qualify for Social Security. The ensuing dispute is not over the sum of money but over the title under which the money is to be paid since for the Indian to accept Unemployment Benefit would be honourable, whereas to accept Social Security which he equates with National Assistance or any more or less charitable supplementary benefit he considers as shameful. In the dispute the official speaks the language as an official and he uses the technical terms related to the various benefits with which the

Indian, though speaking fluent English, is unable to cope. Also the official, i.e. the mother-tongue speaker, does not realise or take account of the different values of another culture than his own. The result is that the Indian finally gives up, perturbed, depressed and nourrishing the suspicion that the official is a racist. Similar situations easily happen where speakers of an L 2 must go to offices, speak to superiors, but they may also occur in shops. To minorise an interlocutor is not only impolite or rude, it is often the source of an arising conflict situation, of aggressiveness or, as the case may be, of race bias.

4. Stereotypes

One claim of a good command of a language is to speak the language idiomatically. This, in other words, also means, that a foreign language learner should not only learn the words for objects, ideas or concepts and activities, but also phrases or idioms or even sayings that stand for meanings. The learner of English very soon learns phrases such as "it makes no difference", "see you tomorrow" or just "see you", or sayings like "my home is my castle", "gentlemen prefer blondes", or a learner may be expected to make exercises for the gradation of adjectives such as : "..as polite as a Frenchman...,as parsimonious as a Scotsman.. as proud as a Spaniard... etc." The phrase ""point d'argent, point de suisse" may or would help create the opinion that the Swiss are very keen on money or do nothing except for money. The "Swiss banks" are a phrase that appears in many contexts, but rarely in a complimentary one. The English use "to take French leave", the French say "filer a l'anglaise." Such stereotypes which are part of the idiomatic stock of an inter-

locutor's lexis that is prone to create prejudice or offend when used with the wrong person, at the wrong moment or in the wrong place. The wish to be idiomatic, to speak the same way the mother-tongue speaker speaks, can easily be the cause of embarrassment, ill feelings or aggressiveness.

There are also other linguistic stereotypes which provoke ill feelings or are a hindrance in communication. One of these is that the mother-tongue speaker treat s the interlocutor with an L2 in the same way he would speak to an L 1 speaker who is less educated. In English, for instance, he avoids indirect speech because it is characteristic of less educated speakers of English to replace indirect speech by direct speech, e.g. " and she says: he is unemployed now, and she says : where does he get the money from, etc.". Brown/Levinson. (1978:122) consider this behavious as a social stereotype, which, for instance British television uses to characterise the language of a charwoman. Consequently she is considered as badly educated or even a little stupid. Or the the choice of term produces social classification or downgrading. In German the word "Putzfrau" is a stereotype with social or intellectual implications, an attempt to avoid this is made by calling her "Raumpflegerin" or "Hilfe im Haushalt". Many words like this have, in the course of time acquired a stereotypical meaning for types of people and their status or behaviour. "Schoolmaster", "official"/"Beamter", "Bauer"/"peasant", "Waitress" can be mentioned as examples. In communication between interlocutors with different mother-tongues stereotypical language behaviour or the use of words which run the risk of

functioning as stereotypes may often prove to be pitfalls and the cause of strange reactions.

5. Conclusions for modern language teaching and text-book writers.

Problems such as we referred to above are generally not the objective of language learning courses, nor are they often explicitly referred to in text-books. On the contrary in the lessons or in the text-books, caused by the wish to present the language and the country and its inhabitants in their typical, characteristic form of representation we often find such generalisations as " In France one..., the Englishman does not... In English we say.. The Spaniards prefer... Americans always ..... etc.etc." In other words text-books and teachers help create in the minds of the students stereotypes which much later in actual communication in multi-lingual backgrounds may cause dismay. Also the different levels of language are often not sufficiently referred to or kept apart, nor is the way people in that particular language commonly communicate. Brown/Levison call the manner of communicating with each other "ethos". "Ethos" explains whether in a particular society people meet, communicatively, in a warm or friendly or in a reserved or cool manner. Then that language is power, can be power, that beyond the grammar and the words techniques of communication such as politeness, indirectness, hedging. talking someone down exist as strategies which the mother-tongue speakers can generally dispose of whereas in this respect the L 2 speaker is at a linguistic disadvantage. The books rarely refer to such ways of using language. And yet in the reality of multi-lingual circumstances the L 2 speaker is

confronted with them. To my mind modern language teaching and modern text-books should restrict themselves to the teaching narrowly defined linguistic properties of a language.

Communication would be easy if one followed only Grices four CPs: 1. do not say more than required (Principle of Quantity) 2. tell no untruths (Principle of Quality) 3. make clear what you want to say,be relevant (Principle of Relation) 4. be clear, avoid ambiguities (Principle of Manner). Communication , in the mother tongue and between interlocutors of an L 1 and an L2 , is possible by following these principles, but is also possible, and this is very often so, when these principles are flouted or violated. It is above all where they are violated that L 2 speakers are caught in a net of difficulties and threatening conflicts. Didactics of foreign language teaching should take notice of these real life communication problems.

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